

Gail Minger, October 2024 “Out of Ashes”

Greetings from Tiger Town!

As the vibrant colors of October foliage paint the landscape in shades of amber, crimson, and gold, we are reminded of the beauty and fragility of life. October is a season of transition, where nature prepares for the quiet of winter. It is also a month of critical awareness: **October is Fire Prevention Month**, a time to reflect on how we can protect the people and places we hold dear.

The Beauty of Autumn, the Importance of Protection

As we enjoy the breathtaking scenery that October brings, we must also remain vigilant about safety. Fires can happen unexpectedly, and their devastating consequences remind us of how quickly life can change. It's a time to take precautions—whether it's in our homes, dormitories, or communities—to ensure that everyone is prepared in case of an emergency.

A Mother's Tragic Loss: A Lesson in Fire Safety

This month we want to share with you a somber experience for one mother, who lost her beloved son in a tragic dormitory fire. His dreams, friendships, and future were cut short in an instant, and his absence is felt profoundly. As



Gail Minger shares her story, she reminds us that fires are preventable, and lives can be saved with proper precautions.

When Gail talks about her family, it is easy to sense her deep love for her twins Michael and Melissa. Her eyes light up as she describes their childhood and the close relationship they shared.

Michael and Melissa were born in the Florida panhandle and from an early age, it was obvious that the two children were uniquely talented in different ways. “Melissa is very social, and she excelled academically. She was president of the honor society in high school and went on to earn her DMD and multiple certifications in dentistry, now specializing in airway science. Michael was musical from a young age and participated in various prestigious choir programs, attending an all-boys, music-focused boarding school in his pre-teens.

“Michael was always quite literal,” Gail explained. “He would ask questions I didn’t have answers to, like: ‘Why isn’t the word Wednesday pronounced as Wed-nes-day?’” He had challenges with executive functioning and spatial awareness and was on the Asperger’s spectrum,” Gail shared. “So that meant that he approached life a bit differently, viewing others through an unfiltered lens. Michael didn’t see

differences in people that others see. He understood people and accepted them as they were with an innocent and pure heart.”

Michael experienced bullying and unkind treatment while attending boarding school, so he understood the importance of inclusivity.

“One day when he was in junior high school, Michael came home and told me he had met someone who he called a ‘genius’ and wanted to hang out with him,” Gail said. “So, we picked up his new friend Danny to take him to a movie, and I soon realized Danny has Down’s Syndrome. After the movie,



I overheard a conversation between the boys in which Danny shared great knowledge about the production and cast of many movies. In that moment, I recognized why Michael characterized Danny as a ‘genius’.”

Michael and Danny remained close friends, even when Michael left home to attend Murray State University in Kentucky.

“Michael was attracted to Murray State for two reasons: music and journalism. He believed he would be challenged musically, and he aspired to be a sports broadcaster,”

according to Gail. “I was nervous about Michael being on his own due to his challenges with organizational skills.”

While moving Michael into his freshman dorm, Gail recognized safety concerns and asked the housing department about the possibility of moving him out of the dorm. She knew there were specific measures that needed to be in place due to Michael’s disabilities. Gail’s concerns were either dismissed by the university or minor accommodations were made.

Tragically, Gail’s worst fears were realized in 1998 when Michael was killed in a dormitory fire during the first semester of his sophomore year. “Losing Michael and then learning the truth of what happened was like living a nightmare.” Gail took the university to task to make changes and became a strong advocate for safer campuses.

“Everyone has to deal with tragedy in their own way. I just started asking questions which led to more questions until I found out an ugly truth: all the protective measures, simple requirements like panic bars on doors, fire stopping required by code and many more noncompliance issues that Murray State had been told to put into place were not there.

I had always taught Michael to seek out adults and authorities if he was having any issues. Unfortunately, in this case, the authorities failed us all. A fire sprinkler system was

highly recommended to be installed in the dormitories by the fire marshal's office. Murray State had been allocated funds for this purpose.”

“Michael deserved justice, and I knew something had to be done to affect change. With the modest settlement from Murray State, we established the Michael Minger Memorial Foundation which enables us to raise awareness about campus fire safety.”



The Michael Minger Act was passed in July of 2001 which led to sprinklers being installed in every dormitory in Kentucky. Gail went on to champion five pieces of legislation to affect positive change for students with disabilities, and federal

legislation was passed eight years later due to Gail's tenacity. “The catalyst of my actions was Michael; however, I wanted to ensure the safety of *all* students; everyone deserves a safe campus, and I will continue this work until I draw my last breath.”

Twenty-six years after Michael's death, Gail continues to hear from people who interacted with him during his short life, including his dear friend Danny who stays in touch with

her. “I still get notes from Michael’s friends recalling his kind and gentle nature, his polite demeanor and his beautiful voice. That helps keep his memory alive,” Gail said, “and Danny always reminds me of how much Michael’s friendship meant to him.”

Almost nine years ago, Gail moved to the Upstate. After settling in, she soon learned about the ClemsonLIFE program, met the program’s director, Erica Walters, and was immediately attracted to the mission of ClemsonLIFE. “If Michael were alive, this is where he would focus all of his energy. He would be elated to see the acceptance and joy this program gives to so many students and their families.”

Gail began to examine how she could honor her son by supporting ClemsonLIFE. Through the Michael H. Minger Foundation, she has made provisions for a significant planned gift to provide financial support for ClemsonLIFE students.

“Michael’s innocence in his understanding of the world was amazing. I know he would tell me ‘Good job, Mom’ for making the decision to support ClemsonLIFE. “It is exactly what he embodied: acceptance, kindness and love. Michael taught me – and everyone he encountered – how to live with a pure heart, seeing only the good in others.”

By supporting ClemsonLIFE, Gail will perpetuate Michael's legacy of kindness and love forward to future generations. We all have special people in our lives who have inspired and motivated us to do more for others. Have you considered creating a memorial or honorarium endowment that will echo someone's memory, purpose and passion in life? By creating a thoughtful plan, you can create a source of energy that will be fueled in perpetuity to ignite and inspire others for future generations.

We would be honored to help you find a way to show your support for a cause or person near and dear to your heart. Please reach out to us for assistance in learning more about the ways you can make an impact today, tomorrow and forever. Our [website](#) features useful information that we hope you will explore, including our free [Wills Guide](#), designed to help you navigate your thoughts and plans before you visit with your attorney and advisors. We always enjoy hearing from you, so please call 864-656-0663 or email us at giving@clemson.edu.

We hope Gail's story of courage and fortitude in the face of tragedy – and how she channeled her passion to protect and provide for others - inspires you to courageously consider what you can do to honor or inspire others as well.

Let the Season Remind Us

Just as the beauty of Fall serves as a reminder of life's preciousness, let this October also remind us to take action to protect what matters most. Fire prevention isn't just about avoiding accidents—it's about safeguarding our loved ones, our homes, and our future.

As we enjoy the crisp air and dazzling autumn leaves, let's take time to ensure that our surroundings are as safe as they are beautiful. Together, we can make sure that every Fall season is filled with color, joy, and peace of mind.

With tremendous gratitude, I am,

Gratefully Yours,

GO TIGERS!

Fire Prevention Month: What You Can Do

In honor of **Fire Prevention Month**, we encourage everyone to take steps to ensure the safety of their loved ones and living spaces. Here are a few important reminders:

1. **Check Smoke Alarms:** Make sure smoke detectors are installed on every level of your home or building and test them monthly.

2. **Plan an Escape Route:** Create and practice a fire escape plan with your family or roommates. Every second counts in an emergency.
3. **Fire Extinguishers:** Keep fire extinguishers easily accessible and ensure everyone knows how to use them.
4. **Beware of Cooking Hazards:** Never leave cooking unattended, especially when using stoves or ovens.
5. **Electrical Safety:** Avoid overloading outlets or using damaged cords and ensure that all electrical appliances are in good condition.